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ABSTRACT

This brief is a special policy report of the Intermediate Service Unit Task Force of the Regional Policy Information Center. Intermediate service units were created in many forms and with many titles to provide assistance and services to local school districts. The task force is working to create and operationalize a "knowledge utilization system" for immediate service units at a regional level and a network of governance and service delivery providers in the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory region. Those activities are intended to affect educational policy at many levels. An overview by E. Robert Stephens emphasizes the importance of regional service units and the initiative to reform them. Following the overview are regional action and agendas for the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Described is a historical biography of intermediate service units for each state. The evolution of Minnesota's regional service delivery system concludes this policy brief. (RR)

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Special Policy Report

Intermediate Units: Renewed Interest in the Redesign of Service Delivery in State School Systems

Overview

By E. Robert Stephens, *University of Maryland, College Park*

Editor's Note: *Intermediate units were created in many forms and with many titles in order to provide assistance and services to local school districts. Their roles may include assisting local districts to respond to initiatives, mandates, and policies emanating from state and federal levels of governance. They deliver services in such areas as vocational and special education, media and technology, and other programs and services (e.g., staff development and health care/insurance). At this time of declining revenues in education, the system for delivering these services is being reconsidered. State task forces have been initiated in many states to study the delivery of services in order to identify duplications and to make recommendations for integrating and coordinating services and their delivery. The results of these studies will likely have strong political implications at the state and regional levels. Legislators will decide about the funding, functions, and format of intermediate units. All of this is occurring at a time when local districts have increased needs for assistance, and public interest in accountability and the restructuring of education is at an all-time high.*

One of the most encouraging steps in the school reform movement is the renewed attention to the structure of state systems of elementary-secondary education. Although this recent spurt of interest is taking many forms, it seems clear that both state and local policymakers are keenly aware that the institutional capacity of state systems must be improved if the new, more rigorous, and broader expectations are to be realized.

State-level, service-delivery initiatives in a number of states served by NCREL have taken many forms:

Ohio

One intent of Ohio's Senate Bill (SB) 102 is to redesign the relatively large number of systems that provide services to local districts.

Wisconsin

State Superintendent Grover's strategic plan for improving education in Wisconsin calls for greater coordination among service providers in the delivery of human services to children and youth.

Minnesota

The legislative initiative in Minnesota is potentially one of the most ambitious and far-reaching in the nation. Its goal is to arrive at the difficult consensus on the educational and fiscal criteria to use in the allocation of functions among local, regional, and state-level jurisdictions—one goal described by Urahn and Marx later in this issue.

Policy Briefs are reports on the status of current issues in education from a national perspective, descriptions of actions and agendas in the NCREL region, commentaries by experts from their particular point of view, and resources for further information.

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Illinois

Illinois' effort to assess the interface between the state's 18 Educational Service Centers (ESCs) and 57 Education Service Regions (ESRs) represents a case of a state seeking a way to deliver more efficient and effective services in the state school system.

These efforts represent states' initiatives to reform service delivery within the region. As these reforms are implemented, each state's school system will likely continue to make use of design configurations for the delivery of services that are compatible with its political traditions and other unique features. Diversity in the governance, funding, and other design features of a state's delivery system have always marked how that state responds to needed changes and will likely continue to do so in the future.

Yet, it also seems clear that certain commonalities exist within the current cycle of statewide restructuring efforts. The one commonality that strikes me as especially critical is that many state and local decisionmakers are searching for a delivery system that will reflect the needs of *both* the state and local school systems. Such a system would provide the state with the capacity to further its priorities while simultaneously allowing substantial local autonomy in shaping local response to state priorities.

While achieving such a delivery system requires a complex understanding of state and local goals and realities, it does not seem to be the quandary it once was. Rather, it seems apparent that many of the traditional and frequently fuzzy distinctions between state and local goals no longer hold. For example, an entire state school system, and all of its component parts, must be better orchestrated if widely adopted state and local goals are to be realized. Such goals include enriching the science and math course offerings available to students, preparing children to start school ready to learn, preparing students and adults with the necessary skills and competencies to compete in a global economy, and preparing students for citizenship. This premise helps to explain both the voluntary and mandated realignments of some of the traditional roles played by the state networks of intermediate units in the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory's (NCREL's) service region.

". . . it is clear that the role of regional service units seems more vital and needed than ever before."

Of course, other policy goals also drive the reassessment of existing regional delivery systems. The search for greater efficiency and accountability is at the forefront of these goals. Furthermore, it is encouraging that the potential intermediate service units have to address equity in a state school system is being recognized, however slowly. For instance, many educators in Ohio hope that their initiative to allow the creation of a regional taxing authority may be a model for others. Iowa is attempting to address perceived inequities in some AEA services by adopting a proposed set of standards and an accreditation system. Unlike Ohio, Iowa AEAs have no taxing authority; funds to AEAs from the state flow through local districts but are earmarked for AEAs.

In conclusion, it is clear that the role of regional service units seems more vital and needed than ever before. Efforts under way in several of the states served by NCREL to strengthen their current delivery systems would suggest that others share a similar vision. ■

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Regional Action & Agendas

Editor's Note: *NCREL's Intermediate Service Agency Task Force contributed substantially to this issue of* Policy Briefs. *The Task Force is working to create and operationalize a "knowledge utilization system" for intermediate service units at a regional level and a network of governance and service delivery providers in the NCREL region. Those activities are intended to affect educational policy at many levels.*

The Task Force provided information which NCREL staff compiled into the "Regional Action and Agendas."

Illinois (ESR and ESC)

From 1869 until after World War II, the county superintendent of schools was a central figure in public school education in Illinois. He or she was the chief administrator for the county, and, in many small counties, was the *only* administrator. He or she also provided a number of services on behalf of the state, such as distributing educational funds and collecting reports.

This central role began to change in the late 1940s when massive consolidation reduced the number of school districts from more than 12,000 to fewer than 1,500. At the same time, an increase in state and federal education programs expanded the size of the state education agency and brought that agency into more direct involvement with the local school districts.

In 1969, legislation was passed that required consolidation of the county superintendent offices by 1977. This consolidation resulted in a reduction in the number of such offices, now named Education Service Regions (ESRs), from 102 to 57. However, the legislation did not change the partisan election of the regional superintendent, and, today, the regional superintendent of schools is the only such elected administrator in Illinois education.

The 1969 legislation also did not make any significant adjustment in the duties of the county or regional office. Today, the regional superintendent continues to distribute funds, process forms, and serve as the primary liaison between the state agency and local school districts, regulating such things as personnel certification, bus driver permits, health/life safety inspections, and school calendars approval.

In addition to the ESRs, Illinois has many other intermediate entities that serve education, including vocational delivery systems, special education cooperatives, and Educational Service Centers (ESCs).

The ESCs were created in 1985 through the Illinois Education Reform Act. The primary responsibility of these 18 intermediate units is to provide services to local districts at the direction of the state agency and also in response to local needs. ESCs provide staff development and technical assistance to schools in such areas as administrators' training, computer education, gifted education, mathematics, reading and language arts, other curricular areas, and learning assessment and school improvement plans.

Each ESC is governed by an 11-member board representing the following categories: regional superintendent, local school board member, local superintendent, higher education, and at least three teachers. These board members are appointed by the regional superintendents in each service area.

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The state provides much of the financial support for both ESRs and ESCs. This fiscal year, state funding for the salary and travel expenses of the regional superintendents and their assistants totals $6,380,000, while state support for ESCs includes $8,532,000 for general operations and $832,000 for the Administrator's Academy.

With Illinois facing one financial crisis after another, state officials have explored a number of ways to reduce costs. One such inquiry resulted in a request to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) from Representative Andrew McGann, chairman of the House Education Appropriations Committee, to study the possible duplication of services between ESRs and ESCs.

An independent committee appointed by the ISBE determined that there was little duplication of service between the two entities. However, the committee concluded "that the present system of regionalized or 'intermediate' service units in Illinois, which includes special education, vocational education, and other cooperatives in addition to the ESRs and ESCs, is not the most effective and efficient way to provide services to and/or on behalf of local school districts. In fact...the present delivery of intermediate services is now characterized by duplication of management, overlapping territories, flawed accountability structures, and service responsibilities which need to be more responsive to changing expectations."

The State Board of Education is now considering State Superintendent Leininger's recommendations on this issue. These recommendations call for consolidation of all existing intermediate units, including ESRs and ESCs, into a single, statewide intermediate service system. The new units, whose number would fall between the present 57 ESRs and 18 ESCs, would be governed in a manner comparable to local school districts, with an elected board and appointed administrator. The new intermediate units would be responsible for providing services on behalf of the state, as is now done by ESRs and ESCs, and for responding to local needs, such as special and vocational education cooperative programming. Funding for core state services would be provided by the state, but the entities also would be able to receive federal and local funds.

The issue of intermediate service delivery is not new in Illinois. Over the past four decades, study after study has been conducted with remarkably similar results and recommendations. There is little doubt of the need for changing the present multi-unit intermediate system which (to quote a 1980 report) "resembles a stack of patchwork quilts" to a system that is more effective and efficient.

The question for Illinois is one of will. There are many political, logistic, and strategic issues to be resolved, and, even when some consensus is achieved, the proposal will still require legislative endorsement before it can be implemented.

Superintendent Leininger has recommended an extended planning process and a phase-in of consolidation efforts that would extend to the year 2000. Given the historic complexity and sensitivity of the topic of intermediate services in Illinois, that timeline does not seem unreasonable.

Indiana (ESC)

Since the enactment of legislation in 1976, Indiana's Education Service Centers (ESCs) have evolved into units that provide programs and services to local school corporations. The state is currently divided into nine ESC service areas. Eighty-two percent of school corporations participate and 62 percent of students are involved in ESC services.

A main purpose of the ESCs is to help member corporations meet local needs through a responsive, economically viable pooling of resources. Center staff can quickly develop services in response to local needs to provide these services in an efficient, timely, and cost-effective manner. This pooling of resources has helped to establish collections of educational materials, information sharing opportunities, and inservice programs designed to serve the educational needs of students within an ESC region. The delegation of the development of programs and services to ESC staff provides for a more efficient use of member schools' time and personnel, especially for those corporations whose fiscal and staffing resources are limited. Each ESC has a Governing Board consisting of superintendents of participating school corporations. An Executive Board, consisting of five to eleven members, is elected from the Governing Board membership.

ESCs also promote the equalization of educational opportunity for the students of all member schools. It does not matter if a corporation is large or small, urban or rural, financially sound or distressed; programs and services are available to all members on an equal basis. This aspect of an ESC makes it truly unique in a world in which funding for many educational programs is competitive—making participation viable only for those corporations with the personnel and time to devote to proposal development. Other programs—based on student population formulas or census information—limit the final dollar amounts. This situation can result in a grant of such small proportion that a solid program is difficult for some corporations to develop. Membership in an ESC can broaden the resource base for corporations, allowing them to participate in programs on more equal footing with their neighbors.

The role of an individual ESC is generally determined by both formal and informal needs assessment of its membership. As a result, the centers share certain characteristics while still maintaining a regional flavor. In all cases, the major role of the ESCs is to facilitate and provide programs and services which meet school corporations' identified needs that would not otherwise be addressed, or which could not be provided in a cost-effective manner by an individual corporation. Thus, ESCs are market driven and client accountable. The ESCs receive approximately $1.9 million in state monies and $1.5 million in local

monies annually (minimum $2.50 per student). Additional funds are received for the cost of services rendered and from grants.

Within their defined role, commonalities exist among centers in the provision of the following services:

- Maintenance and dissemination of a media collection
- Provision of career information/guidance information services
- Planning and implementation of staff development opportunities
- Negotiations of cooperative purchasing agreements
- Repair and maintenance of audio-visual and/or computer equipment
- Provision of instructional software
- Provision of portable planetariums to enhance science instruction
- Provision of microfilm services for administrative support to members

"With varied educational reforms comes a challenge to school corporations to define new directions as they move toward the 21st century."

It is important to note that the manner in which these services are fulfilled varies, as does the extent of commitment to individual services.

Although these activities represent existing programs and services offered by the ESCs, the centers are investigating new and expanded roles. With varied educational reforms comes a challenge to school corporations to define new directions as they move toward the 21st century. The existing framework of support from the ESCs provides a logical structure to which schools could turn for further programs and services designed to facilitate these new ventures. New or expanded roles might include the provision of services and programs related to performance-based accreditation, staff development of the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP) and proficiencies, resource centers for special curricular areas, at-risk students, and curriculum development.

Iowa (AEA)

The establishment of intermediate services in Iowa dates back to 1858 when county superintendents were appointed to oversee each county's school districts, which numbered over 5,000 in 1910. Since then, the number of districts has steadily declined. In 1957, the state legislature allowed counties to jointly employ one superintendent to handle the smaller number of districts. Then, in 1965, the legislature approved the merger of two or more counties into joint county school systems. With fewer rural schools, the role of county superintendents was diminished; however, a problem developed under this new arrangement. Some districts received more services from their county systems than others. The state legislature responded in 1974 by replacing county systems with 15 Area Education Agencies (AEAs).

AEA budgets are made up of a combination of direct state aid, local property taxes, and various grants. The mechanism that brings state funds to the agencies is unique because the AEAs have no taxing authority. Instead, AEAs rely on the local school district to generate dollars for their operations and also to serve as a conduit for state funds. AEA funding appears in each local school district's budget, but it merely "flows through" the school budgets. In reality, it is subtracted by the state comptroller and forwarded directly to the AEA. The funds are not part of the schools' budgets; they are earmarked for the AEAs.

The mission of AEAs is to ensure that all children in the state have equal opportunities for a quality education. The legislation creating the AEAs followed several years of regionalized education services provided initially through "county superintendent" units and then through "joint county" units. Since 1975, the AEAs have become a viable, growing, and highly valued component of Iowa's educational system. These services include:

- Identification, diagnosis, educational planning, and therapy for children with mental, physical, emotional, or learning disabilities, from birth to age 21
- Inservice on materials selection, curriculum development, instructional technology, teaching, and administrative skills
- Staff development courses and computer labs
- Administrative data processing
- Circulating collections of instructional videos, films, books, software, kits, records, filmstrips; van delivery to area schools
- Professional development materials, curriculum materials, and access to educational databanks
- Media production, printing, and duplication services
- School planning studies, surveys, testing enrollment projections, and program evaluations
- Cooperative purchasing of supplies, equipment, and technological hardware

The AEAs range in size from those serving as few as 12,000 students to one which serves 109,000 students. Each AEA maintains three service divisions: special education support, media, and educational services. These divisions all contribute to support a central administrative component. The division of special education is supported primarily with state funds while the divisions of media and educational services are supported by local property taxes.

A current review of contextual aspects of the AEA system should include comments in the areas of funding, politics, equity, and competition. The AEAs maintain a very stable funding base with nearly all services being state or locally funded. Few services are provided on a "sale of service" only basis. The funding formula for the divisions of educational services and media were just reauthorized

indefinitely. Based on interaction with legislators, some hope remains for increased funding for those divisions in the years ahead. Both instructional and support funding in special education are currently under review. However, state leaders are concerned that AEAs have exceeded their ability to fund special education at current levels. Task forces are working on the problem and a special legislative interim study is expected. Through the last few years, because of expansion of services and salary settlements consistently higher than new dollars, AEAs have been in a staff reduction mode. Fund balance carryover has been much less than in years past. AEAs have no taxing authority and no mechanism for funding capital improvement projects. Many AEAs are now experiencing the need to renovate, expand, or acquire facilities with no funding mechanism to do so. The only source of funds for such projects is program/services funding.

The annual funding level for the AEAs is $103,771,631. The amount of funding is based on a set dollar amount multiplied by the number of students in each school district in each AEA.

Members of local school district boards of education elect members to the board that governs each Area Education Agency. This system maintains the Iowa philosophy of local control through a structure which closely parallels that of local schools.

Areas served by each AEA are divided into no less than five and no more than nine director districts. These director districts are approximately equal to one another in population. They may consist of one larger district, several smaller school districts, or a combination. Local school boards in each district elect AEA directors, providing every corner of the population a voice in governance of their AEAs and offering a structure parallel to local districts: both AEAs and local schools have a citizen board; both agencies have management teams accountable to the board. The system keeps governance in the hands of the citizenry and also closest to those who are governed. Local school districts serve their communities; AEAs serve local school districts.

Political support for AEAs seems strongest in the state legislature which is influenced heavily by local education agency personnel. For efficiency and equity reasons, an effort was made by the legislature and Department of Education (DOE) in 1988 to reduce the number of AEAs. The effort was abandoned after considerable political pressure from communities to leave the present system intact. Efforts still continue, however, to address perceived inequities in services among AEAs by adopting a proposed set of standards and an accreditation system for AEAs. The AEAs and Department of Education in Iowa maintain fairly cooperative working relationships. Declining resources are forcing a review by both entities regarding their roles and responsibilities. Such a review could result in AEAs assuming a greater role in technical assistance while the DOE maintains its focus on leadership, policy, and research.

The issue of equity of services continues to be a concern. Superintendents see and articulate concerns about differences in services. Many feel that larger AEAs are able to provide a wider array of services. However, many of Iowa's "urban" districts are concerned that AEAs do not and cannot meet their needs. They express a desire to receive the funding and do the job themselves.

Competition compounded by declining resources could become a factor for AEAs. Other entities are attempting to carve out a niche in such areas as staff development, curriculum development, and school improvement. Despite the challenges indicated above, Iowa's AEAs look forward to "seizing the opportunity" in the 1990s in what many are calling the decade of collaboration.

Michigan (ISD)

Michigan's Intermediate School Districts (ISDs), or Educational Service Agencies (ESAs), as many of them are becoming known, have a long tradition. In 1867, the state legislature created the office of county superintendent of common schools in counties having at least 19 local districts; the superintendency was an elected position. In 1891, legislation created the office of county commissioner of schools, also an elected position. The commissioner granted teacher certificates, conducted county institutes, and acted as superintendent in districts that did not have a superintendent.

In 1935, counties with populations of 250,000 or more became county school districts, with the commissioner still elected for a four-year term. In 1945, the superintendent became a "field agent" acting for the state superintendent. In 1949, the legislature made all counties in the state county school districts. The office of county commissioner was abolished, and the position of county superintendent was created. Superintendents were appointed by the county board of education.

In the mid-1950s, the legislature passed Act 18, which provided for the education of handicapped children. This far-reaching legislation also granted the county school board the authority to levy, by a vote of the people, a special or charter millage to finance educational programs for the handicapped. This new responsibility and authority placed the county school board in a completely new role. This role—along with local district needs for specialized, cost-effective, and cooperative services—was critical in generating interest and support for the concept of a county service agency.

In 1962, with the enactment of Public Act 190, the 83 county school districts were renamed and reorganized into Intermediate School Districts. They were structured to provide administrative and instructional services to local schools, and they became separate taxing units with control over their operating budget and tax levies. They vary in number of districts served from 2 to 34, in size of student populations from 3,674 to 360,006, and in geographical size from 305 to 3,753 square miles. A series of

legislative actions and reorganizations has led to today's structure of 57 intermediates serving 566 school districts.

Each intermediate is governed by a board which varies in number and method of selection. Forty-three of the intermediates have five-member boards elected by an electorate of one representative from each local district board of education; twelve have seven-member boards elected in the same way; and three have seven members elected by popular vote of registered voters in their areas. The term of office for all board members is six years.

"With the recent passage of legislation for quality schools and significant budget reductions, ISDs are becoming a critical link between local districts and the state."

The intermediates are supported financially from four sources of revenue: 1) tax levies on property within the district, 2) state appropriations for general operations, specialized programs, and certain demonstration projects, 3) federal appropriations flowing directly from the federal or state government for categorical programs and projects, and 4) fees paid by constituent school districts, other ISDs, or local districts in other ISDs. State appropriations for FY 1986-87 totalled more than $152 million; tax levies for FY 1990-91 totalled more than $412,063,070. Federal appropriations and fees vary significantly among the intermediates and from year to year.

Among the services ISDs provide to their constituent districts are:

- Programs for low-incidence special education students
- Cooperative purchasing for audio-visual and technology equipment
- Inservice education for teachers, administrators, boards of education, and parents
- Vocational and technical education programs
- Data processing for student services, transportation routing, management information, and payroll
- Consultation for curricular and instructional programs
- Technical assistance and consultation for technology for administrative and instructional purposes

In 1989, the ISDs developed the document, "Michigan's Intermediate School Districts Mission, Role, and Essential Services," which outlined the overall mission of ISDs within the statewide educational framework and their responsibilities in fulfilling that mission. Also in 1989, some intermediates petitioned the State Board of Education for approval of a name change to more clearly reflect their mission of service. Some are now called educational service agencies (ESAs) or districts.

With the recent passage of legislation for quality schools and significant budget reductions, ISDs are becoming a critical link between local districts and the state. In response, ISDs have expanded their roles in helping local districts with school improvement, core curriculum, accreditation, and annual reports. Michigan ISDs can expect to see their roles grow and change as local school districts rise to the challenges of the 21st century.

Minnesota (ECSU)

Since 1967, Minnesota school districts have been participating in formalized cooperative efforts. The concept of cooperative educational programs and services spread rapidly as educational costs escalated and the need for more efficient uses of resources became imperative. During the 1967-68 school year, school districts in several regions of the state formed Education Research and Development Councils (ERDCs) to meet common needs in a cost-efficient manner. These councils were funded through the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title III funds. State legislation was introduced in 1971 and again in 1973 to establish a system of Minnesota Educational Service Areas to serve as the vehicles for providing and promoting educational cooperation among school districts throughout the state. While neither of these efforts were successful, the 1973 Legislature authorized the establishment of one pilot Education Service Area in southwest and west central Minnesota. This unit was created to "assist in meeting specific educational needs of children in participating school districts." Further, it was to "supplement the educational program of local school districts in areas of special need or areas of low incidence of pupils and enrollments."

In 1975, legislation was again introduced to establish regional cooperative units. Despite a unanimous affirmative in both houses of the legislature, the bill failed passage on a technicality. Finally, in February 1976, a bill was enacted to authorize the establishment of nine regional units to be called Educational Cooperative Service Units (ECSUs, pronounced "X-sue").

In 1979, the ECSU legislation was amended to provide for two additional activities. The ECSU board was encouraged to serve the number and needs of dropouts and potential dropouts in its service area. Also, insofar as possible, the ECSUs were to provide technical assistance for long-range planning to school districts upon request, to establish a common data base for local and regional decision making, and to provide technical assistance for program planning and evaluation to districts upon request.

The 1987 Legislature amended the ECSU legislation to assure that each ECSU's annual plan addresses specific educational services which can be better provided by an ECSU than by a member district and includes methods to increase direct services to school districts in cooperation with the State Department of Education. The ECSU plans for the 1989-90 school year and after had to be coordinated with the management plan of the Department of Education. The Department can withhold all or a portion of these

funds from an ECSU if the Department determines that the ECSU has not been providing services according to its annual plan.

ECSU policy is to make general and uniform educational opportunities available to all children of the state and to encourage cooperation in making available programs and services which may be provided most efficiently and economically by a consortium effort.

There are nine designated ECSUs that coincide with the governor's planning regions. Creation of the ECSU occurs upon petition to the State Board of Education by a majority of all school districts in an ECSU. Public school districts of the state have the right of full membership. Non-voting associate memberships are available to non-public administrative units. All memberships in ECSUs are voluntary except in one region where school districts must participate in planning and research functions.

An ECSU is governed by a board of directors of not less than six nor more than 15 people. The directors are current members of school boards of participating public school districts. They are elected by a vote of all current school board members. An advisory council composed of superintendents, central office personnel, principals, teachers, parents, and lay people give advice and counsel to the ECSU board of directors.

ECSU programs and services include:

- Administrative services and purchasing
- Curriculum development
- Data processing
- Educational television
- Evaluation and research
- Inservice training
- Media services
- Publication and dissemination of materials
- Pupil personnel services
- Regional planning, joint use of facilities, and flexible and year-round scheduling
- Secondary, post-secondary, community, adult, and adult vocational education
- Individualized instruction and services, including services for students with special talents and special needs
- Teacher personnel services
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Health, diagnostic, and child development services
- Leadership or direction in early childhood and family education
- Community services
- Shared-time programs

"The next two years may prove to be a pivotal time in the development of a new elementary/secondary educational service delivery system in Minnesota."

Financial support for the ECSU programs and services is provided by participating local school districts. Private, state, and federal support may financially supplement programs. The state appropriation for FY 1990-91 was $68,000 per ECSU except for the Region 11 ECSU which received $136,000 as did the Southwest and West Central ECSU (Regions 6 and 8) which is a combined ECSU permissible under the ECSU law. Funds are allocated by the Department of Education after review of each ECSU's annual plan. It is important to note that the legislation to establish the ECSUs makes them fully accountable to the local school districts. The ECSUs must provide programs and services which demonstrate an effective use of local educational resources.

The state legislature has decided to study the present system in order to establish one formal cooperative structure between the Department of Education and the local administrative units. The new cooperative service delivery system is to be in existence by June 30, 1995. Community and State Board of Education recommendations on the types of services, boundaries, funding systems, and governance associated with the system will be sent to the legislature by January 1993.

The next two years may prove to be a pivotal time in the development of a new elementary/secondary educational service delivery system in Minnesota.

Ohio

Ohio's schools are guided by a set of common goals and standards established by the Ohio Department of Education (DOE) and the State Board of Education. The DOE and Board share the responsibility of providing direction and assistance to school and district staff in the form of curriculum guides, special projects, and publications.

In accordance with Ohio law, the 88 county offices are required to supply the supervisory, special education, administrative, and other needed services to Ohio's 371 local school districts. In addition to satisfying this statutory requirement, county offices have been providing similar educational services to city and exempted village districts as well. Strengthened by the provisions of Senate Bill 140, Ohio's 88 county offices now provide a variety of educational services to nearly all of Ohio's 1,770,865 primary and secondary students and nearly all of the state's 838 local, city, exempted village, vocational, and special education districts.

As the ideal structure to coordinate many of the state and federal programs, county offices assist the school districts in meeting standards with services designed to supplement local educational programs. Local schools and districts are further assisted by a comprehensive delivery system composed of various educational service agencies and programs. These agencies and programs include County Education Offices, the Division of Special Education, Area Media Centers, the Division of School Finance/Field Services Section, the Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN), the Division of Vocational and Career Education, Joint Vocational School Districts, and several others.

The County Education Offices furnish leadership and consulting services designed to strengthen local districts in areas they are unable to finance or staff independently. These 88 offices provide supervisory, administrative, special education, and other services, as well as cooperative services such as data processing, unified purchasing, and media services to over 370 local school districts. In addition, the offices serve regional needs by coordinating many state and federal programs. Without the supplemental services provided by the offices, many local school districts would be unable to support these specialized programs.

The education of Ohio's handicapped youth is under the direction and supervision of the Division of Special Education. Programs and services are provided by school districts to assure that a free and appropriate public education is available for all handicapped children. Inservice training, technical assistance, and assessment services are provided through a network of 16 Special Education Regional Resource Centers (SERRCs). The Division also administers funds for educating gifted youth and works with colleges and universities to provide pre- and inservice training for teachers of exceptional children.

The Ohio Media Region Plan grew out of the dissolution of the Ohio Department of Education's film library. In 1972, when budget cuts caused the elimination of the film service, the DOE divided the state into nine regions, each containing 300,000 students. Regional planning committees were appointed to determine the number of media centers and the funding agent for each region. In eight of the nine regions, County Education Offices have been designated as the fiscal agent.

In 1979, legislation (SB59) was passed authorizing the Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN). OECN comprises school districts organized into self-governing consortia. In each consortium, a central site operates data processing equipment which provides services to the entire consortium.

Major sources of funding for the CSSDs or Multicounty School Service Districts (MCSSD) shall be based upon the following current and new funding sources:

- Units (current plus additional)
- ADM (current)
- All state equalization subsidies (new)
- Service contracts and/or excess costs (current plus additional)
- Permissive taxing authority (current and new)
- Office space funding (as provided in law)

Funding for services/programs provided by the CSSDs or the MCSSDs are paid by the state and include, but are not limited to: local deduction, extended service allocation, per pupil subsidy, and supervisory unit allowance. Such funding is paid directly to the CSSD by the state, without school district deduction. Specialized instruction programs (e.g., science, math, labs, etc.) should receive premium unit funding to attract and retain exceptionally qualified instructors. Total annual intermediate funding figures would not be comparable to other state delivery systems.

The total "Ohio delivery system" is a complex system intended to supply specific services to city, exempted village, and school districts in the state of Ohio. The Board of Education of the single-county County School Service Districts (CSSD) is elected in accordance with Section 3311.052 of the Ohio Revised Code. The Board of Education of a multicounty CSSD is elected in accordance with Section 3311.053 of the Ohio Revised Code. Currently, the Ohio legislature and the Ohio County Superintendents Association are exploring ways to streamline this educational delivery system.

Wisconsin (CESA)

Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) serve educational needs in all areas of Wisconsin by enabling school districts to communicate with each other and with the Department of Public Instruction. Because they work on a regional cooperative basis, CESAs strive to economically and efficiently provide educational programs and services requested by local school districts and other public entities.

In 1963, the Wisconsin Legislature created 19 CESAs that functioned from July 1, 1965, to July 1, 1984, at which time the CESAs were reorganized into 12 regions as directed by 1983 legislation. When the Wisconsin CESAs began in 1965, they had no budgets, staff, or programs. Today, their total budgets exceed $70 million; their total staff exceeds 1,300; and their programs and services number in the hundreds.

Examples of services provided include:

- Curriculum development assistance
- School district management development
- Vocational and exceptional education development
- Research, human growth and development
- Data collection, processing, and dissemination
- Inservice program development.

CESAs provide the specific programs that school districts identify as priority needs, and often a number of schools can jointly share the services.

Each CESA is governed by the school districts it serves by a board of control consisting of one school board member from each of 11 school districts within that CESA. The board of control determines agency policies; obtains agency funding; approves service contracts with school districts, counties, and other CESAs; assesses pro rata service costs to local school districts; authorizes money spent for equipment, space, and personnel; and contracts for an agency administrator. The agency administrator coordinates services provided to local school districts and programs for the professional advisory committee. This committee is comprised of the chief school

administrator of each district in the CESA. The committee advises the agency administrator regarding services needed, and this information is then presented to the board of control.

During 1990, the CESA administrators revised the CESA mission and further established three primary goals to guide the 12 agencies. The mission of the Cooperative Educational Service Agencies is to provide proactive educational leadership and promote efficiency, effectiveness, and economy in the delivery of quality educational programs, services, and other related opportunities to Wisconsin school districts and communities—today and in the 21st century. The CESAs' efforts are driven by three primary goals: to be regarded as a regional educational resource center encompassing all aspects of education; to facilitate educational technology through the creation of educational technology centers, including a statewide distance learning network linking every school district in Wisconsin; and to be primary providers of staff development and curriculum services to local school district staff.

In an effort to establish themselves as a regional educational resource center, CESA administrators have instituted a short-term plan that extends through May 1992. First, the administrators will reach a consensus on a definition of a resource center, including both material and human elements. Next, each CESA will identify the resources presently available in its schools, and will conduct a needs assessment to identify additional resources to include in the resource centers. Each CESA then will identify resources to be shared among the resource centers. Finally, the CESA administrators will compile a list of resources that should be available in all CESA resource centers, and will establish a timeline for implementing the plan.

Similar planning is under way for the creation of CESA educational technology centers. In early October 1991, CESA administrators established a statewide Instructional Technology Council with members from each CESA providing leadership and coordination of key projects. In 1992, the Instructional Technology Council will develop a mission statement and future service plan, and they will initiate their first special technology project. Shortly afterwards, each CESA will complete a districtwide survey of existing technology and will identify technologies to be shared or replicated by other CESAs. Survey results will be reviewed by the Council, which will recommend technologies for distribution to all CESA technology centers.

The CESA's third goal of becoming a primary provider of staff development and curriculum services to local school district staff is also being addressed. In September 1991, CESA administrators drafted a comprehensive plan for establishing Regional Staff and Curriculum Development Services Centers in each of the 12 CESAs. Like the other CESA centers, they are to be governed by certain guiding principles. According to the model drafted by CESA administrators, each center will be child-centered, consumer-sensitive, goal-directed, and future-oriented, and will facilitate and provide training. ■

Further information on intermediate units can be obtained by contacting the following state education agency personnel:

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A Legislature's Vantage Point

The Evolution of Minnesota's Regional Service Delivery System

by Susan Urahn and Bill Marx, *Minnesota Legislature*

Over 20 years ago, Minnesota realized that regional systems were a cost-effective way to provide quality educational services to students throughout the state. Since that time, a wide variety of regional service delivery systems have evolved. We use the term "evolved" deliberately because each different type of regional system has emerged to meet specific needs of students, parents, school districts, or the state.

Regional systems in Minnesota are of two basic types:

Systems resulting from formal agreements between school districts. These agreements are initiated by two or more school districts, usually to cooperatively provide a specific type of service. For instance, joint powers agreements are widely used to provide special education and telecommunications services. However, they could be used to provide almost any type of service. Minnesota also provides legislation that allows school districts to form cooperatives for secondary vocational education.

Multi-service regional systems. For each of these systems, the Legislature has specified a skeleton of services that the system is expected to provide, which districts are eligible or required to use the system, and funding mechanisms. School districts are allowed to determine how much use to make of each system and, to some degree, which services each system will offer. These regional systems—which include computer regions, intermediate districts, education districts, and educational cooperative service units—tend to be larger than those listed in the first category. Some of the systems are available to all districts, some only to districts in specific regions. Most offer an array of services.

The state has played only a limited role in directing the development of an integrated, regional, service delivery system. The result has been limited coordination among systems and overlap in the types of services provided. Very few school districts avoid regional systems entirely, some districts use only one, and others pick and choose among several systems to assemble a full range of services. Legislators and education service providers have expressed concern that this patchwork approach is inefficient and directs too much revenue to many layers of administration. This growing concern led the 1991 Legislature to set in motion plans for a new education delivery system.

"Minnesota's goal in restructuring the regional service delivery system is increased efficiency and effectiveness. What that system will look like and whether it will meet these goals have yet to be determined."

The PreK-12 Community Service and Education Service Delivery legislation, passed in 1991, specifies that all of the systems described above must be replaced by a single, regional delivery system. In addition, regional delivery centers for the State Department of Education must be established. This new regional system will coordinate local health and human services to children and families in order to eliminate duplicate and overlapping services in those areas.

The State Board of Education already has begun a two-stage process of implementing the new system. First, they are collecting information from school districts to ensure that the new regional delivery system will meet their needs. They also are determining which level of organization—the school district, the regional delivery system, the regional arm of the state department, or the central office of the state department—is the most appropriate for the delivery of all the services currently offered by the existing regional systems. The Board will report to the 1992 Legislature on their progress in collecting district-level information. In 1993, the Board will make a final report with recommendations. The new system will be in place by 1995.

Minnesota's goal in restructuring the regional service delivery system is increased efficiency and effectiveness. What that system will look like and whether it will meet these goals have yet to be determined. ■

Susan Urahn is a Legislative Analyst in the Research Department of the Minnesota House of Representatives.

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Introducing NCREL's Regional Policy Information Center

In 1991, NCREL initiated the Regional Policy Information Center (RPIC) which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. RPIC will develop policy information products and materials for policymakers to use as they deliberate about and establish policy in four important areas:

- Student assessment
- Governance and service delivery
- Education professions
- Technology

The policy information products and services developed and distributed by RPIC will be designed to address specific issues within these four broad areas; will reflect the unique characteristics of both the rural and urban communities in the region; and will encourage and support greater interactions among policymakers in the region on issues of common concern.

This issue of *Policy Briefs* is a special policy report of the Intermediate Service Unit Task Force of RPIC which is working to create and operationalize a "knowledge utilization system" for intermediate service units at a regional level and a network of governance and service delivery providers in the NCREL region. These activities are intended to affect educational policy at many levels.

Since October, 1991, RPIC has been under the directorship of Deanna Durrett, formerly a policy analyst for State Superintendent H. Dean Evans of the Indiana Department of Education. She also served as the NCREL's state education agency liaison for Indiana. Gordon Hoke, former acting director of RPIC, will remain as a consultant for the Center.

For more information about RPIC, please contact Deanna Durrett at 708/571-4700.

Opinions expressed in the commentaries do not necessarily reflect the views of NCREL staff or Board. Facts and ideas presented in NCREL's Policy Briefs are intended to survey a current issue and not to advocate a particular position.

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